THE LAST ORGANIC

By 2093, “organic” wasn’t just unfashionable - it was borderline criminal. Whisper it too loudly and you’d have a Ministry drone hovering outside your window, politely reminding you that dirt was unsanitary nostalgia and sunlight an unlicensed hazard.

The Ministry of Nutritional Efficiency - an institution with all the warmth of a refrigerated spreadsheet - had solved hunger by removing everything inconvenient about food. Taste, for instance. Texture. Joy.

Meals came in tidy silver sachets labeled Nutri-Unit™ 7B - identical, optimized, and obedient. It tasted like compliance.

Above Neo-Toronto, protein towers loomed like smug gods of efficiency, exhaling steam into a sky that had long ago given up on being blue. Inside, vats of cultured meat pulsed gently - alive in the same way a spreadsheet is alive if you stare at it long enough.

No farms. No soil. No rain. Just quarterly earnings.

And surveillance.

Every citizen wore a Nutritional Compliance Band - sleek, silver, impossible to remove without losing circulation and citizenship. It tracked intake, mood stability, and deviation. Too much curiosity triggered alerts. Too much dissatisfaction triggered re-education.

The Ministry didn’t just control food.
It controlled appetite.

Beneath the city - past polite transit announcements and aggressively clean corridors - there lived a rumor.

A tomato.

Not the approved “Tomato-Adjacent Nutrient Sphere™.”
A real one. Lumpy. Uneven. Potentially judgmental.

And at the center of this agricultural heresy stood Magnolia Vale.

Magnolia was the kind of woman who didn’t enter a room so much as occupy it. Six feet tall in boots, louder than policy, with a halo of red curls that looked like they had personally offended authority.

Once, she had been the Ministry’s golden voice. The face of campaigns like *“Trust the Tank.”* She had told millions what to feel about food - and they had listened.

Because she had listened too.

Until the apple.

It happened during a routine inspection of an Agricultural Eradication Zone—a place where nature had been professionally erased.

A crack in the concrete.
A root that refused instruction.
One crooked branch.

And one apple.

Magnolia checked her wrist. The Compliance Band pulsed softly - recording, analyzing, approving.

She hesitated.

Not because she feared punishment.
Because she didn't remember wanting anything.

Then she bit into it.

The Band spasmed.

Flavor flooded in - sweet, sharp, chaotic. It didn't ask permission. It didn't follow guidelines. It overwhelmed.

For the first time in years, Magnolia felt something unscripted.

The Band tightened.

"Unauthorized stimulus detected," it chimed gently.

Magnolia laughed… Then cried… Then laughed again - because both felt equally illegal.

Above her, the drone recorded everything.

By evening, Magnolia Vale was declared a Bio-Radical.
By midnight, her citizen profile was erased.
By morning, she officially did not exist.

Enter: The Gardeners.

The Ministry called them “cosplay horticulture.” The files called them extremists. The citizens called them rumors.

They called themselves necessary.

Their leader, Gabriel Knox, had once engineered perfection - synthetic poultry so efficient it never needed to resemble a chicken.

Now he smuggled the real thing.

“Look at that,” he said once, holding up an egg to Magnolia. “No barcode. No predictability. Just risk.”

Magnolia turned it over in her hand.

Her Band - now forcibly removed, leaving a scar like a second wrist - itched phantom signals. She could still feel it judging her.

“Does it always feel like this?” she asked.

“Like what?”

“Like you’re about to do something wrong… even when it’s right?”

Gabriel smiled. “That’s called being alive.”

Life underground was slow. Painfully slow.

You didn’t print food. You waited for it.

Seeds were planted in stolen soil. Water was rationed. Light was mimicked. Failure was common.

Magnolia struggled.

She killed her first three plants.

She overwatered the fourth.

The fifth simply refused her.

“You can’t command it,” Gabriel told her. “It’s not a system.”

Magnolia stared at the wilted leaves.

“For the first time,” she said quietly, “I don’t know how to succeed.”

Gabriel shrugged. “Good.”

The Ministry responded as expected - with confidence.

Campaigns intensified:

“Natural growth is unstable growth.”
“Trust efficiency. Trust certainty.”

But something had shifted.

People were hesitating before swallowing.
Lingering on flavors that weren’t there.
Dreaming of tastes they had never known.

The Ministry noticed.

And it adapted.

New Bands were deployed - stronger, tighter, capable of releasing mild sedatives to suppress “sensory deviation.”

Hunger wasn’t enough anymore.
Now, even curiosity was regulated.

The raids began.

Gardeners disappeared.
Greenhouses burned.
Soil was sterilized on sight.

Gabriel was captured during an evacuation, laughing as he released a flock of hens into the tunnels.

“Run,” he told Magnolia.

“I’m not leaving you.”

“You’re not,” he said. “You’re continuing me.”

He was taken.

Magnolia didn’t scream.

She planted.

Harvest Day arrived.

The Ministry’s celebration of total control.

Magnolia watched from above, hidden among illegal vines twisting around the broadcast tower.

Her hands shook.

Not from fear.

From doubt.

One broadcast wouldn't undo decades of obedience. One scent wouldn't dismantle a system.

"What if they don't care?" she whispered.

For a moment, the old Magnolia - the spokesperson, the believer - answered back:

Then none of this mattered.

Magnolia closed her eyes.

Then she remembered the apple.

"That's enough," she said.

The screens flickered.

Citizens paused.

They saw dirt. Real dirt. Hands buried in it. Struggling. Failing. Trying again.

They saw Gabriel - laughing, imperfect, uncontained.

They saw Magnolia.

Not polished. Not scripted.

Real.

Then the air changed.

Ventilation systems released something illegal:

Smell.

Fresh basil. Warm bread. Roasted chicken that had once been alive.

People froze.

Not because they understood it.

Because they felt it.

Deep, buried, undeniable.

The Bands pulsed rapidly - detecting anomaly after anomaly.

But something unexpected happened.

People didn’t correct themselves.

They breathed in deeper.

Magnolia stepped into view.

“You were told perfection tastes better!” she shouted.

Silence.

“It doesn’t. It just makes you forget what you’re missing.”

Security forces closed in.

Magnolia picked up an egg.

Her hand steadied.

“This,” she said, “isn’t efficient.”

She threw it.

It shattered across the Minister’s limousine.

And something else shattered with it.

Not glass.

Certainty.

From rooftops -

Tomatoes.
Carrots.
Fistfuls of dirt.

The uprising wasn’t violent.

It was defiant.

Compliance Bands began to overload - not designed to handle collective disobedience. Some sparked. Some shut down.

For the first time, the system couldn’t keep up.

Because it had never accounted for something so inefficient.

Choice.

Weeks later, Neo-Toronto looked… different.

Messier.

Alive.

Not everyone changed. Some still trusted the sachets. Some feared the soil.

The Ministry still stood - issuing warnings, adapting language, rebranding control.

But now, it was questioned.

And that was enough.

Magnolia worked in a rooftop garden, hands deep in dirt.

A child approached her, holding a misshapen tomato.

“What is it supposed to look like?” the child asked.

Magnolia smiled.

“It’s not,” she said. “It just is.”

The child took a bite - and made a face.

“It’s weird.”

Magnolia laughed.

“Give it time.”

Some say Gabriel escaped.

Some say he didn’t.

But sometimes, at the edge of the city, people hear clucking.

And laughter.

Beneath layers of steel, steam, and carefully written policy - the earth waited.

Patient. Unoptimized. Impossible to tame.

Steady, natural, and very, very difficult to control.